Castlemaine Naturalist

October 2013

Vol. 38.9 #414

Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Whistling Kite Photo – Joy Weatherill

Photopoint Project Database Launched

Chris Timewell

In the late 1990s, the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club commenced their 'Photopoint' Project. The objective of the project is to monitor changes in vegetation and landscapes over time by taking regular photos at particular locations in the local area. Largely as a result of the efforts of club members Ern and Lesley Perkins, the project has grown to include more than 1600 photos from over 900 locations.

A year or so ago, Connecting Country received some funding through the Victorian Government's Communities for Nature program to assist the field nats in maintaining the information from this project. First, this involved preparing hard-copy archive-quality copies of every photo, and lodging these for safe-keeping with the Castlemaine Historical Society. Then, opportunistically, a talented Connecting Country volunteer - Cara Byrt - offered to develop the photos and associated information into a user-friendly database.

This CD database was launched at Connecting Country's AGM on 24 September 2013, with a demonstration by Ern. Free copies will be distributed at the October and November CFNC general meetings.

Please note:

- Unfortunately the database only works on PC computers (and not Apple computers)
- Due to the size of the database (about 1.9 GB), it works best if you copy the files from the CD onto the hard drive of your computer, and then run the database from the hard drive.
- To start looking at the database, open the CD using Windows

Explorer, and then click on the 'start.html' file. There should be no need to open any of the folders.

The Photopoint Project will continue, and the database will grow, over subsequent years.

This CD provides an amazing snapshot (at as mid-2013) of some of the changes that have occurred in the Mount Alexander Region over the past few decades.

~~~~~~

Notes from the Past

Rita Mills

Recently I was given three "Bird Lover", the Gould League of Bird Lovers' of Victoria magazine, for 1949, 1950-51 and 1952-53, and I find them very interesting, comparing knowledge, attitudes, interests, and particularly children's observations with what I find today.

One of the authors of articles in the magazine was Crosby Morrison, who was another influence on my interest in nature. I used to listen to him on the air of a Saturday and loved to get the Wildlife magazine which he edited. The ones I still owned were eaten by some of the local wild life – they had been stored up in our old shed, and when I finally tracked them down they had become a termite nest!

Most of the letters, if not all, are from school children, and this one, from a girl from School No. 1365, Tallangatta, is titled "The Straw-necked Ibis".

> "Living in the district of Tallangatta for the past six years, I have come to believe that the straw-necked ibis is the most useful bird of my district." (This apparently was a theme suggested for letters as there were a number of them on that subject) "This ibis is distributed throughout Australia, but is accidental to Tasmania. It is also called Farmer's Friend, Dryweather-bird, and Letter-bird. It is usually found in flocks, frequenting swamps, the margins of streams and lakes, or pastoral lands.
>
> "It is one of the most useful birds we have in Australia; fortunately it is common and generally receives the protection it deserves. Being chiefly nomadic in habit, it travels over a vast area of country. We see it dotted over pastoral lands, intent on the capture of injurious insects or their larvae, or following in the wake of a plough, feeding on the insects thus disturbed. Its greatest enemy has been man.
>
> "The ibis has not a very nice song. It makes a squawking, croaky sort of noise.
>
> "The nest is a platform, made by bending down polygonum, reeds, and other aquatic herbage. The bird breeds in colonies generally numbering thousands of birds. The favourite situations of colonies are small islands of reeds or lignum bushes scattered over swamps.
~~~~~~

"The straw-necked ibis lays three to five dull white and lustreless eggs. It breeds from September to December.

"The ibis's head and foreneck are naked black, as is its arched bill. Thee pointed plumes on its neck are straw-coloured. Its breast is greenish-purple, barred with black, and the rest of it is white."

The style of writing is certainly different from today's, and it brought back memories of the trouble to which my 5th grade teacher went to teach us to make our essays and compositions more interesting .

I also was impressed by the apparent effort to get her facts right. I got the impression that a lot of reading went in to the story, as well as her own observations – and unlike today, she didn't have to cheat with a spell check on a computer to get her spelling right!

'Understanding the Natural Soundscape'
A presentation by Andrew Skeoch

On **Thursday 10th October** Newstead Landcare Group will hold their Annual General Meeting and we are delighted to have been offered a presentation by one of our members, **Andrew Skeoch** of Listening Earth.

All Castlemaine Field Naturalists and the general public are welcome to attend this event at Newstead Community Centre starting at 8pm. We ask for a gold coin donation to cover costs.

Andrew describes his presentation thus:

"The sounds of our natural environment are comprised of many voices; birdsong, insect choirs, frog choruses. Collectively, the songs and calls of all these species form the biophony; the living sounds of our natural landscape.

Studying how all these diverse vocalisations interact in the acoustic environment, can tell us a fascinating story about how our bushland ecosystems work and have evolved".

Featuring sound recordings and sonograms, from local places to habitats around the world, Andrew will explore the fascinating understandings emerging from the new field of soundscape ecology.

Many of you will be familiar with Andrew's recording of birdsong on a CD in the back of the *Wildlife of the Box-Ironbark Country* book by Chris Tzaros, and this event is a great chance to meet with and learn from a local expert.

Frances Cincotta
Newstead Landcare President
Phone 5476 2691

Lamington National Park

Helen and Kit Morris

Binna Burra in Lamington National Park in the McPherson Range is a World Heritage site with Gondwana rainforests and first recognized of significance in 1915

The park was once a large shield volcano 100km. in diameter, Mt. Warning being the central peak of the volcano. The park is the source of two rivers, waterfalls, and six various forest types, marsupials koalas, paddy melons, many birds including endangered Eastern Bristle Bird, Cox's Fig parrot and Albert's Lyre Bird, Lamington Crayfish (also rare), and reptiles.

There are 150km of mapped walks, all surveyed at 1:11 gradient, and varying in length - 4 to 15 km, also the longer trail to O'Reilly's. Early people observed the cattle tracks to the pastures and decided the cows knew best how steep an incline should be to climb! Walking was a pleasure in the mainly dappled forests, though some steep steps occurred hewn out of rock. The park has cool temperate, wet subtropical, wet and dry parts to the forests with steep gullies fern filled. Around the lodge open lawns attracted many Paddy melons, Koala which hopped into the sheltering bush, which smelt strongly of pittosporum in full bloom.

The relic Gondwana *Nothofagus moorei* seen on the Tullawallal walk has trees five thousand years old. These trees related to *Nothofagus antarctica* (deciduous), are evergreen or part deciduous, and found only in wet tropical highest altitudes of 3000 ft. of Lamington plateau, also in NSW. Their large trunks up to one metre wide have scaly bark, knotted roots often exposed by erosion, covered by moss and lichen. Many have multiple roots emerging at the base by suckering which is an asexual reproduction. We were told this is due to the gradual warming of climate, as now these trees cannot set seed.

Many different trees were pointed out to us, and also their loss due to intensive logging early last century. Few of the majestic red cedar remain, or hoop pines, these only in the most inaccessible places. The "coachwood" tree with its white bark and pinkish timber was so named for its use in panelling coaches years ago. Its wood smells strongly of vanilla being thus used by early settlers as flavouring - now to be found to contain a warfarin like substance - a blood thinner and rat killer. "Wait awhile" vine climbing up to the canopy with its sharp tendrils to trap the unwary, was stripped of the prickles and used by indigenous people for basket weaving. Another plant to avoid had large oval leaves with silica spines underneath, which broke off into your skin causing painful itching for weeks, far worse than nettles! Interestingly, an antidote could often be found growing nearby - related to the arum family - also toxic. However, it is known that aboriginal people actually crushed and leached this in water for food, after treatment. The indigenous people did not live in these ranges but were known to visit and left little evidence.

In the forest we saw many log runners, heard the Green Catbird, while in the clearing near the lodge, Yellow Robins, fleeting honeyeaters, swifts, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Whipbird, Brush-turkeys, Brown Treecreeper, Satin Bowerbird, Wompoo Fruit Dove. A young speckled carpet snake curled under a shrub in the gardens too. A small box with a hive of wild bees proved their worth as since being placed near the lodge most of the native plants in the landscaping started to set their seeds!

Photos by Joy Weatherill on the Bellarine Peninsula

Above: Golden headed Cisticola

Right: Caspian Terns

Below: Cormorant queue on the Swan Bay jetty

Club Excursion - Harcourt Reservoir September 13

Bird list by Noel Young -

Great Crested Grebe, Hoary-headed Grebe, Eurasian Coot, Black Swan, Great Egret, Great Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, Darter, Pacific Black Duck, Musk Duck, Magpie, Mudlark, Australian Raven, Welcome Swallow, Crimson Rosella, Eastern Rosella, Galah, Superb Blue Wren, Grey Shrike-thrush, Rufous Whistler, White-browed Scrubwren, White-plumed Honeyeater, Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Willy Wagtail, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Striated Pardalote, Clamorous Reed-warbler.

Also sighted on the east side were a Fox and a Red-bellied Black Snake.

Wednesday Wildflower Wander at the Monk (25th September)

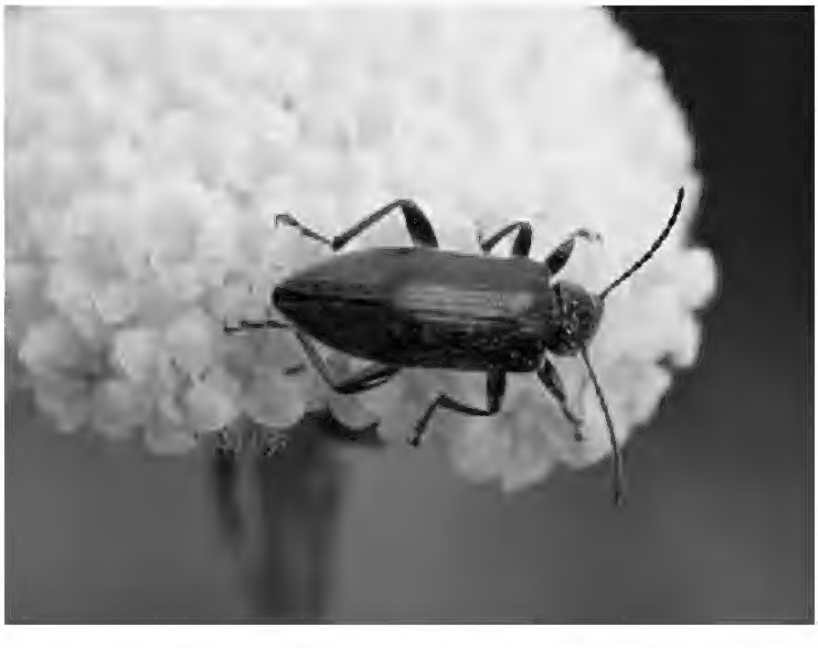
As we have come to expect of the Monk, there was a great show of wildflowers. In our brief excursion of an hour on the hillside, Richard Piesse compiled the following list of flowering plants;

Arthropodium strictum	Chocolate Lily
Caladenia fuscata	Dusky Fingers
Caladenia clavescens	Castlemaine Spider
Diuris pardina	Leopard Orchid
Glossodia major	Wax-lip Orchid
Pterostylis melagramma	Tall Greenhood
Luzula meridionalis	Wood-rush
Wurmbea dioica	Common Early Nancy
Acacia acinacea	Gold-dust Wattle
Acacia aspera	Rough Wattle
Acacia paradoxa	Hedge Wattle
Acacia pycnantha	Golden Wattle
Craspedia variabilis	Billy Buttons
Microseris lanceolata	Yam Daisy
Ozothamnus obcordatus	Grey Everlasting
Millotia tennifolia	Soft Millotia
Stackhousia monogyna	Creamy Candles
Drosera peltata ssp *auriculata*	Tall Sundew
Tetratheca ciliata	Pink Bells
Daviesia ulicifolia	Gorse Bitter-pea
Platylobium montanum ssp *montanum*	Hill Flat-pea
Rhytidosporum procumbens	White Marianth
Grevillea alpina	Downy Grevillea
Ranunculus sessiliflorus	Annual Buttercup
Pimelea linifolia	Slender Rice-flower

Above: Castlemaine Spider Orchid

Below: "Button bug"

- photos by Noel Young at The Monk 25/9/13



I'm not good at seeing small critters, but this dark beetle stood out on the bright yellow Billy Button on which it appeared to be feeding. No doubt the prize was worth the risk of attracting predators, or perhaps it relies on having a nasty taste?

CFNC Guest Speaker in October -
Ian Wacey on the Waterfalls of Victoria

In 2011, a new book hit the shelves – "250 Victorian Waterfalls". The authors, Ray Barber and Ian Wacey, are waterfall enthusiasts who spent over six years researching and visiting many of Victoria's significant waterfalls. Some waterfalls were very easy to get to whilst others were for experienced bushwalkers only. Their book contains a photograph of each waterfall, plus a range of other information such as location, access, height and origin of the waterfall name and other information.

On the Friday 11 October, Ian Wacey will be the guest speaker at the general meeting of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club. His talk will cover information about the various waterfalls across the state, some of the adventures and challenges they faced, and their on-going research and surveys of the State's waterfalls. Copies of their book will be available for sale and signing on the night.

Observations

- **Reports at the September meeting -**
- Natalie de Maccus has a large showing of orchids around her new premises in North Castlemaine - Blunt Greenhoods (~200), Golden Moths, Pink Fingers, and a Blue Caladenia. But Dwarf Greenhoods have not done well this year
- Lots of frogs including a Perrons, and a Black faced Cuckoo-shrike heard - Rita Mills
- **Blue winged Parrots** seen in Box Lane - Sue
- Denis and Christine recorded six species of frog in one swamp south of Apsley. And a Squirrel? Glider using one of the nest boxes at home.
-
- **Other reports:**
- Oriole heard calling - Kit Morris
- George Broadway: Thousands of earthworms on the road after rain. Wood Duck with many chicks observed near Forest ck. They are known to "collect" chicks from other's broods.
- Rita - Boobook Owl back, Oriole heard, a Needletail Swift seen, and over recent weeks, we have had Horsfields, Shining Bronze, Fantail and Pallid Cuckoos calling

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme
September 2013

Fri October 11 meeting: speaker IAN WACEY - waterfalls of Victoria

Sat October 12 field trip: Loddon Falls

Wed October 16 - Wildflower Wander - 4pm

Fri November 8 meeting: speaker to be arranged

Sat November 9 field trip: Bells Swamp

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.
Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.
Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 7.30 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions for 2013
Ordinary membership: Single $30, Family $40
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2013 Committee

Rita Mills (President)			5472 4553
Chris Timewell (vice President)			5472 1553
George Broadway (Secretary)	georgebroadway@bigpond.com		5472 2513
Nigel Harland (Treasurer)	5474 8246	Barbara Guerin	5472 1994
Chris Morris	0418 996 289	Richard Piesse	0448 572 867
Noel Young (Editor)	5472 1345		

[email newsletter material to: **noel.young@optusnet.com.au**]

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc. PO Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.
Inc #A0003010B